Name of Organization: Ohio Lake Erie Buffer Team

Type of Organization: Other

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Project Title: Go Native in the Buffer

Project Category: Habitat (Ecological) Protection and Rest

Rank by Organization (if applicable): 0

Total Funding Requested ($): 68,500 **Project Duration:** 2 Years

Abstract:

Go Native in the Buffer will accelerate the rate at which landowners will apply conservation buffer practices(filter strips and riparian forest buffers) to agricultural land in the Lake Erie Watershed.

Go Native in the buffers is an educational, informational, marketing, and outreach program to educate and inform landowners of the benefits of installing conservation buffers and native vegetation in riparian zones within the Lake Erie Watershed. The program will directly support implementation of the Lake Erie Buffer Program Strategic Plan, The Lake Erie Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the Lake Erie LaMP by making landowners aware of these programs and increasing participation. It will provide resources to expand the existing educational and informational outreach of these programs beyond current capabilities and more specifically encourage use of native plants in these programs, with special emphasis on using native grasses and forbs on grass filter strips.

Geographic Areas Affected by the Project

States:

☐ Illinois	☐ New York	☐ Superior	☒ Erie
☐ Indiana	☐ Pennsylvania	☐ Huron	☐ Ontario
☐ Michigan	☐ Wisconsin	☐ Michigan	☐ All Lakes
☐ Minnesota	☒ Ohio		

Lakes:

Geographic Initiatives:

☐ Greater Chicago ☐ NE Ohio ☐ NW Indiana ☐ SE Michigan ☐ Lake St. Clair

Primary Affected Area of Concern: Maumee River, OH

Other Affected Areas of Concern: Black River, Ohio
Cuyahoga River, Ohio
Asthabula River, Ohio

For Habitat Projects Only:

Primary Affected Biodiversity Investment Area: Western Lake Erie/Oak Openings

Other Affected Biodiversity Investment Areas:

Problem Statement:

The Western Lake Erie Watershed is predominately intensively cultivated agricultural land which delivers large quantities of sediment and nutrients to Lake Erie. The Ohio Lake Erie Commission has identified sediment as the primary impediment to improving water quality in the watershed and the watershed is lacking in plant and animal diversity and wildlife habitat. The Lake Erie LaMP draft report identifies near shore tributaries, coastal wetlands and fish habitat as impared due to eutrophication.

Farmers in the watershed have spent decades removing natural vegetation in the riparian zones which contributes to sediment and habitat problems. As a result the International Joint Commission has recommended a 30 percent increase in buffer strips by the year 2002. The Ohio Lake Erie Buffer program contains a goal of installing 50,000 acres of new conservation buffers by the year 2005.

To help achieve these goals the State of Ohio and USDA are launching a 10 year Western Lake Erie Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program partnership with a goal of installing 67,000 acres of grass filter strips and riparian buffers in the watershed. The program offers specialized incentives to utilize native warm season grasses in these buffers. However in many cases farmers do not yet understand the benefits of buffers and awareness of the new program is needed. Moreover, they do not have the specialized equipment to seed native grass species on the new buffers, nor the understanding of the benefits of native grasses or the experience in using native grass plants. A marketing program is needed to promote the advantages and benefits of participating in the new buffer program and specifically the advantages and means of using native plant species in the filter strip plantings.

Proposed Work Outcome:

This project will develop an educational and informational outreach program entitled "Go Native In The Buffer" to support and expand implementation of the Ohio Lake Erie Buffer Program and the Lake Erie Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The project will increase educational and outreach beyond what the existing financial and informational resources of the two programs currently allow. The outcomes of this project will:

- Increase program participation and use of conservation buffer and riparian practices.
- Result in more widespread use of native grasses and forbs within the grass filter strip riparian zones.
- Provide landusers the encouragement and means (equipment and agronomic expertise) to successfully use native grasses in lieu of traditional cool season grass species.

The proposed work will include:

Supplying 8 specialized native grassland drills for farmers in the CREP area to use to enable them to have the equipment needed to seed native warm season grasses such as Bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass and Sideoats Gama. Project funds will provide two drills and Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited , and ODNR Wildlife will match this with 6 drills. Local SWCD's and Pheasant Forever Chapters will schedule, manage, operate and store the drills. (Project funds = $25,000)

Production of numerous educational products to increase awareness of the buffer programs and opportunities including: 1) A marketing brochure which explains the benefits of using native grass plants on the buffers, includes color photo's of adapted species, and explains cultural needs. 2) A"Go Native" sticker which can be used on buffer signs, literature, vehicles, windows, etc., to increase public awareness of the concept of using native plants in buffer areas. 3) A Lake Erie Buffer Poster which shows attractice conservation buffer practices and which can be displayed in local SWCD offices, Farm Supply Stores. (Project Funds = $15,500)

Providing "Conservation Buffer Area" road signs to local soil and water conservation districts who will post them in visible locations on high quality buffers throughout the watershed. A concurrent information campaign will be developed to market the signs to the traveling public as the symbol of a good farmer and steward of the land. (Project Funds = $4,500)

Film, produce and distribute an Ohio Conservation Buffer Video. Target audience will be farmers and landowners. Content will include what the conservation buffer practices are, the benefits of installing buffers and of using native plant species, and testimonials and interviews with Ohio Farmers who have installed the practices and like how they work. The video will be used by field personel when working with customers and clients. (Project funds = $15,000)

Install conservation buffer field demonstrations. 1) Install a field demonstration of new "soft engineering" conservation practice technology being pioneered by the USDA agricultural Research Service. This practice uses native warm season grasses to create sediment retention terraces, rather than using earthern construction. The vegetative terraces temporarily retain and filter surface runoff. 2) Installl a Riparian Forest Demonstration Planting which utilizes native Ohio tree species to estabish a model riparian forest buffer. (Project funds = $2,000)

Produce for training purposes a slide library of buffer images and a slide program which explains the benefits of buffers and benefits of using native grass species. Target audience for the slide training presentation will be landusers, certified crop consultants, and agency personel. Library images will be available for use by all buffer team agencies and partners in their information programs. (Project funds = $1500)

Specific outcomes of this project are:

This project will contribute towards full achievement of the Ohio Lake Erie Buffer Program Goal of 50,000 acres on new buffers in the watershed. Achievement of this goal will trap 385,000 tons of eroded sediment particles annually within the watershed and prevent this material from reaching the streams, tributaries and lake. Full achievement of project goals will increase plant and animal diversity in the watershed and provide 50,000 acres of new riparian zone habitat. The new acres will be protected via a state and federal contract and will be devoted to this habitat for a minimum time period of 20 years.

Project Milestones:	Dates:
Project Start	06/2000
Begin filming video	07/2000
Print, distribute & begin posting signs	09/2000
Purchase native grassland drills	12/2000
Install native grass terrace demo	05/2001
Release poster and grass booklet	06/2001
Complete video filming & begin editing	09/2001
Release Video and Project end	06/2002

☐ Project Addresses Environmental Justice

If So, Description of How:

☒ Project Addresses Education/Outreach

If So, Description of How:

This project will produce educational, informational and outreach materials which will be utilized and shared by natural resource managers and agency staff in the 34 counties within the Lake Erie Watershed. It will directly support implementation of the Lake Erie Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Training materials will be utilized by agribusiness and certified crop consultants to train their customers and employees. More than 3000 farmers within the watershed are projected to participate in the program each year. The materials produced will encourage these 3000 farmers to "Go Native" with their plant selections.

The project will post more than 1200 Conservation Buffer Road signs which will identify outstanding examples of conservation buffer practices on the land and will be seen by the traveling public in 34 counties. Since Lake Erie is a tourist destination, the project educational benefits will have an impact statewide and beyond.

The video produced will be applicable to nearly all of the Great Lake states.

The native grass terraces and riparian forest demonstrations will transfer new and innovative technology to Ohio farmers.

The materials will support a coordinated educational effort by the 22 different agencies and natural resources organizations (both public and private) that are actively cooperating to implement the Lake Erie Buffer Program. The collaborative approach will deliver a consistent and coordinated message to the public. Due to the number and diversity of the participating organizations, the message will reach many different constituencies.

Project Budget:

	Federal Share Requested ($)	Applicant's Share ($)
Personnel:	2,000	2,500
Fringe:	0	0
Travel:	0	0
Equipment:	25,000	75,000
Supplies:	0	0
Contracts:	0	0
Construction:	0	0
Other:	38,500	69,000
Total Direct Costs:	65,500	146,500
Indirect Costs:	3,000	0
Total:	68,500	146,500
Projected Income:	0	0

Funding by Other Organizations (Names, Amounts, Description of Commitments):

Cash Funding

Pheasants Forever Organization.....$25,000	Cash Contribution to Drill Program
ODNR Div. of Wildlife..... $25,000	Cash Contribution to Drill Program
Ducks Unlimited $25,000	Cash Contribution to Drill Program
Lake Erie Buffer Team..... $20,000	Cash Contribution to Marketing Items

In Kind Funding

Lake Erie Buffer Team.....$21,500	In Kind Services of 22 team members.
Local Soil and Water Conservaton Districts...$30,000	In-kind services to contact landowners
& Local Pheasants Forever Chapters	In-kind services to manage drills.

Description of Collaboration/Community Based Support:

This project is a collaborative effort of the Ohio Lake Erie Buffer Team and will directly support & expand implementation of the Lake Erie Buffer Program Strategic Plan. The Lake Erie Buffer Team consists of 23 members representing 22 different public and private natural resource organizations in a voluntary partnership. The Erie Basin Resource Conservation and Development Organization serves as fiscal agent for the team. USDA NRCS provides team leadership and coordination. Ohio Lake Erie Buffer Team members are:

Ohio Lake Erie Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Black, Cuyahoga and Maumee Remedial Action Plan Representatives, Erie Basin Resource Conservation and Development Organization, Ohio Corn Growers Association, Ohio Department of Agriculture, ODNR Div. of Forestry, ODNR Div of Natural Areas & Preserves, ODNR Div of Soil and Water Conservation, ODNR Div of Wildlife, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Ohio State University Sea Grant and OSU Extension, Ohio Wetlands Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Toledo-Lucas Port Authority, USDA Farm Service Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur.